

***Celeste Three is Missing.* A sample taken directly from the manuscript.**

**Context: Greg Topozian and his deputy Jack Smith take the Celeste pilot John Sturgess to view the proposed landing site for Celeste on a Greek island. The space plane had been designed to land only at its base in Arizona.**

When dealing with the Americans, Gregory had maintained the pretence of being Greg Todd. Now he and Smith were in Xanthos on a hot afternoon with John Sturgess, who was seeing the island for the first time. He was not happy.

“You guys are *nuts*,” he fumed. “Fucking, off-the-wall crazy.”

The island was not a comfortable place to be at mid-day in summer and Sturgess was hot, sweating and plainly upset. A few minutes earlier the helicopter had descended in a graceful, sweeping arc before setting down gently on the helipad. The three men had emerged into the shimmering, eye-watering heat and walked the short distance to the top of the road.

Gregory was concerned that the helicopter pilot might be within earshot. He moved close to Sturgess and whispered, “Careful, John,” nodding towards the pilot. “We need to keep it down, don’t want him getting curious.”

Sturgess lowered his voice. “OK, OK.” He put his hand out, pointing down the road.

“Look at it, Greg. It’s a fucking switchback. I’d have problems putting a Cessna down, no way the *Celeste*’s gonna make it.”

Jack Smith nodded to Gregory and went back to the helicopter. He spoke to the pilot and led him towards the house.

Gregory took off his sunglasses and wiped his brow with a handkerchief.

“The road’s going to be leveled. It’ll be fine, don’t worry.”

“Don’t worry? Don’t worry?” Sturgess spread his hands. “You got no fucking idea what’s involved. I’m telling you, this is *impossible*.”

“For any other pilot, yes. But for the original *Celeste* test pilot, no. Difficult, maybe, but not impossible. Not for you, John.”

Sturgess kicked at the tarmac. “God dammit, you’re not listening. That plane lands at a hundred and twenty miles an hour. What you gonna do, put up a fucking tennis net to stop her?”

They were walking slowly down the road, away from the house. Gregory took a baseball cap out of his jacket and pulled it onto his head.

“We have a deal, John. We offered you two million. You pushed us to four, plus our guarantee that nobody will get hurt. So far we’ve kept our word and you got one million up

front. You kept your word getting Bonner to let you fly one more time. We’ve done our homework and we know that you can do this. Everything you say is true, except the bit about it being impossible.”

Sturgess stopped, stared down the road and shook his head slowly. He had calmed down. “It would take a miracle.”

“Just tell us what you need to make it possible.”

Sturgess looked around. “Lemme think about it.”

“Come into the house. It’s air conditioned and there’s cold beer in the fridge.”

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